 Purposeful Pauses …Pushups for the Brain 

The yearly cost of stress to American businesses is as high as $300 billion. Over the past 30 years, self-reported levels of stress have increased 18 percent for women and 25 percent for men. By all accounts, we have never been more maxed out or deficiently attentive in our nation’s history. Help is on the way. “Mindfulness” in the form of meditation, yoga, centering prayer, and other mind-body practices, is sweeping across our stressed-out land like a great breath of fresh air. In addition to a growing number of public school districts, major corporations, prison systems, healthcare organizations, arms of the U.S. military—even our representatives on Capitol Hill—are turning to mindfulness practices to help meet the demands of our hyperkinetic world.“It’s a methodology that anyone can use,” adds Sharon Salzberg, co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. “You don’t have to have a belief system. It requires no faith or ideology. **Mindfulness is as simple as watching your breath.”**

“Mind fitness” to day is like the early days of the physical fitness movement in the U.S. “In the beginning, fitness was just for ‘nuts,’” says Meng (as Tan likes to be called). “Then in the 1920s, after it was studied, it became an established field. People knew it was good for them and learned how to do it. Hundreds of studies conclude that when we spend regular intervals being quiet, emptying our minds, relaxing our nervous systems, and raising awareness of what’s going on between our ears, we are, indeed, happier, healthier, more competent, helpful, empathic, and creative-minded people. Mindfulness practices are also useful in the treatment of pain, stress, anxiety, depressive relapse, disordered eating, and addiction.

This results in increased activation of the brain’s left frontal regions, a process associated with more positive emotional states. Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin, Madison says, **“Mindfulness practices can actually change the function and structure of the brain.** We have the ability to regulate both attention and emotion, both of which are more flexible and plastic than we had previously considered. Our behavior can literally help shape the structure and functioning of our own brains.” “We also transform the way in which we meet our lives.”So try taking “**Purposeful Pauses**” during the day. “Purposeful pauses don’t add time to your day,but they do encourage us to find those moments in the day when we can **reset.** The body gets rest, the mind gets rest, and this space makes a big difference in how exhausted we are at the end of the day.”

Major Spiese says “Teaching mindfulness shows that it make us a better person by helping us to decompress and reduce suicide rates and help with the of treatment for post-traumatic stress . **“It’s like doing pushups for the brain.”**

**So sit quietly take a** **Purposeful Pause and listen to your breath. Think of only your breathing as you slowly inhale and exhale to rest and reset your body and your brain.**

Stay tuned for more helpful breathing tips in next week’s email.

Resource:<http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2013/09/03/in-the-magazine/health-in-the-magazine/mindfulness.html>

[www.commonhealth.virginia.gov](http://www.commonhealth.virginia.gov)

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